

Lieutenant Charles Johannes du Plessis DE CLERK (542407V), S.A.A.F.

In October, 1944, Lieutenant De Clerk was watching a Squadron of Spitfires coming in to land at Kalamaki, Athens. One Spitfire had just landed when a second, in its landing run, overtook the first and the two aircraft, by now stationary and about 40 feet from Lieutenant De Clerk, began to burn fiercely, with ammunition exploding and bullets being flung in all directions. Lieutenant De Clerk, disregarding his personal safety, immediately dashed forward and extricated one pilot (who was unconscious) from the blazing wreckage. Whilst he was still on the mainplane with his burden, there was a violent explosion in the cockpit, but Lieutenant De Clerk carried on with the rescue and passed the pilot to safety. He then returned and made a gallant attempt to rescue the second pilot, but was unsuccessful as a mainplane was resting on the cockpit of the aircraft concerned. By his quick action and disregard for danger he undoubtedly saved the life of one pilot. His extreme heroism was exemplified when he returned to the scene in a gallant attempt to rescue the second pilot.

Acting Flight Lieutenant Harry FOSTER (50292), R.A.F.V.R.

On 26th March, 1945, a serious fire broke out in the incendiary area of the Bomb Dump at Royal Air Force Station, Wickenby. Flight Lieutenant Foster, the station armament officer, was quickly at the scene of the fire and, taking charge of the situation, directed the Fire Fighting Parties to the position where their appliances were likely to be most effective. This necessitated his exposing himself to personal risk from exploding "A" type incendiaries. Despite his efforts, the fire continued to spread and eventually ignited a shed which contained many thousands of explosive incendiaries. These caught fire and pieces of burning metal were hurled some hundreds of yards away on to another incendiary area and also on to some high explosive bombs. The situation had now become highly dangerous and Flight Lieutenant Foster was hit several times by bomb fragments. Showing great initiative, however, he obtained an armoured Beaverette car and, inside this, he was able to advance with a fire hose into an area which otherwise was quite untenable owing to the intensity of the flying fragments. By the action taken then he prevented the fire from spreading to another incendiary bay. Incendiary bombs continued to explode elsewhere for about two and a half hours and the conflagration was only brought under control after approximately 6 hours. During the whole of this period Flight Lieutenant Foster was in the forefront, wherever the fire was fiercest or where his specialist knowledge was required by the Fire Services. He suffered considerably from the effects of heat and fumes, but he organised his section so that a large operational bombing commitment could be executed next day. This officer displayed excellent leadership and high courage under difficult and dangerous conditions.

Flying Officer George Henry BELL (169274), R.A.F.V.R.

Flying Officer Bell is the Gas and Fire Officer on a station operating an Anglo-Polish Fire Section. On the afternoon of 26th March, 1945, he and his stand-by Fire Crew were called to a fire at the Cluster Projectile Store at Royal Air Force Station, Wickenby. Upon arrival, the store was found to be burning fiercely and high explosive incendiaries were exploding in all directions, greatly adding to the danger and difficulties of extinguishing the fire. Flying Officer Bell directed his team with exceptional skill and succeeded in bringing the fire under control. He showed little regard for his own safety and, by his untiring efforts and splendid example, he won the confidence and high regard of all Polish personnel under his control.

Flying Officer James BRANFORD (155827), R.A.F.V.R.

One night in August, 1943, Flying Officer Branford was air bomber in a Stirling aircraft which attacked Berlin. Shortly after the bombs had been dropped the aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and commenced to burn furiously. The order was given to abandon aircraft, and Flying Officer Branford landed by parachute some 10 kms. west of Berlin. He sustained a gashed chin and a sprained ankle. He was able to make contact with the navigator and both hid by day and travelled by night; on the fifth day they were

arrested in a wood near a railway siding. They were taken to a factory for interrogation and spent the night there. The next morning they were taken to Templehof aerodrome and put in separate cells. Both were then sent to a camp near Frankfurt and again placed in separate cells. Flying Officer Branford was interrogated by two officials but, as he would not divulge operational information, he was threatened with sterner treatment. He made friends with some Frenchmen who ran the administrative side of the camp and was able to assume the role of a Frenchman. He succeeded in accommodating himself in the French barracks and, together with a companion, he hid in a dust cart beneath the rubbish. By this means both left the camp, but Flying Officer Branford's companion got cramp which compelled him to show himself. Flying Officer Branford just got clear before the German guards bayoneted the dust heap. He was taken back to the camp. Flying Officer Branford escaped later in April, 1944. He spent 4 days in hiding with other escapers but all had to leave when they were informed that the Germans were about to search the place. Flying Officer Branford and a companion then made their way to a marshalling yard. They hid by the railway lines, together with some more escapers, and boarded a truck. Six were in the party and, for four days, they travelled in the truck. The travellers then left the truck as they had hardly any food and were all suffering from the heat and lack of water. Flying Officer Branford was afterwards taken care of by a Dutch farmer with whom he stayed for 7 weeks. An underground resistance worker interrogated him during this time and finally, in June, 1944, a journey was arranged for him and he was able to return to this country.

Flying Officer Robert Kerr MCCREADIE (164144), R.A.F.V.R.

On 21st March, 1945, Flying Officer McCreadie was 2nd pilot of an aircraft which crashed into the water and broke its back on impact. The Wireless Operator was thrown through the broken fuselage and jammed underneath the aircraft. Flying Officer McCreadie immediately got off the mainplane into the water, released the wireless operator, and pulled him on to the mainplane in a state of complete exhaustion. The flight engineer, who had sustained a broken hip and severe lacerations about the face, was trapped in the rear of the aircraft and was shouting for assistance. Flying Officer McCreadie immediately re-entered the aircraft and, with considerable difficulty, extricated him and towed him to a rubber dinghy which other members of the crew had inflated. Although the wrecked aircraft was liable to sink at any moment he thus knowingly endangered his own life twice in order to save his comrade's lives. Flying Officer McCreadie displayed devotion to duty worthy of the highest praise and his complete disregard for personal safety set an excellent example.

Flying Officer Arthur Douglas STEPHENS (152541), R.A.F.V.R.

In February, 1945, an aircraft, piloted by Flying Officer Stephens, crashed and caught fire in a paddy field shortly after commencing an operational sortie. He extricated himself from the cockpit, although suffering considerably, his clothing being on fire. On looking to see whether the navigator was safe, he saw that, although the latter was conscious, he was unable to unfasten the cupola. The aircraft was now burning fiercely and ammunition was exploding. Flying Officer Stephens rushed to the rear cockpit and attempted to wrench open the jammed cupola, but failed. He then climbed on to the burning fuselage, and in his efforts to release the navigator (who was still conscious and shouting for assistance) he dislocated his left shoulder and sustained further serious burns to his face and arms. Flying Officer Stephens was finally forced to desist in his heroic efforts to save his navigator, but not before he had done all that was humanly possible. He showed exemplary conduct and completely disregarded his own safety in his attempts to rescue the navigator.

*Air Ministry, 17th August, 1945.*

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the following awards:—

*Distinguished Service Order.*

*Wing Commander.*

Peter Reginald Whalley WICKHAM, D.F.C. (33493), R.A.F.